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THE RENAISSANCE OF HAND-PRINTING IN BRITAIN

By W. G. BLAIKIE-MURDOCH

THE applied arts were never practised to finer purpose in Britain than during the 18th Century. Opulent in brilliant architects and porcelainists, cabinet-makers and silversmiths, the land was consonantly rich at that time in typographers lavishing on their work an artistry of the most aspirational kind. But, with the advent of machinery, printing was gradually degraded to the status of a mere trade, the very taste for books of beautiful guise seeming for a while to have passed away.

Nevertheless, the love of literature is indeed a religion, so that ever and again there will be some who, imbued with that love, will desire to see their gods enshrined in temples of beauty. And presently Ruskin's eloquent voice was raised in condemnation of machine-made articles, his bias herein shortly eliciting the ardent support of William Morris, who was the real father of that rare hand-printing which forms one of the greatest artistic glories of Britain in recent years.

It is true that two men preceded Morris in reverting to manual typography: R. L. Stevenson and Henry Daniell. But the former really conducted his press just to amuse his young step-son, Lloyd Osbourne, and Daniell's tasteful work somehow failed at first to win much notice, whereas Morris, with his magnetic personality, soon gained very

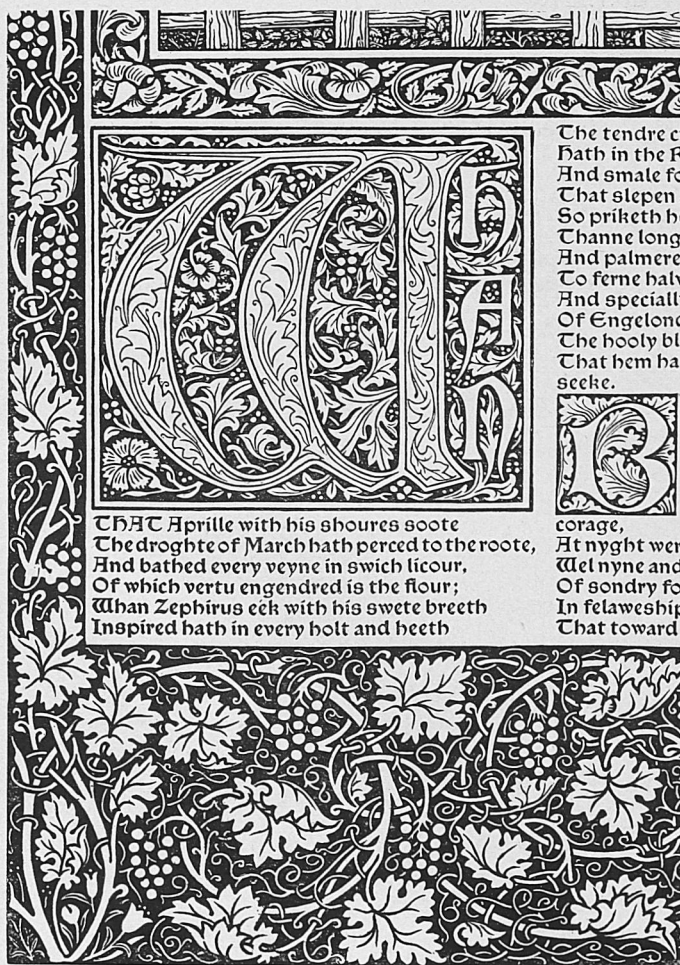
SPECIMEN OF AN INDUCTION TO A POEM.

Induction
to a poem

O! I must tell a tale of chivalry;
For large white plumes
are dancing in mine eye.
Not like the formal crest
of latter days:
But bending in a thousand graceful ways;
So graceful, that it seems
no mortal hand,

Or e'en the touch of Archimago's wand,
Could charm them into such an attitude.
We must think rather, that in playful mood,
Some mountain breeze had turn'd its chief delight,
To show this wonder of its gentle might.

Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry;
For while I muse, the lance points slantingly
Athwart the morning air: some lady sweet,
Who cannot feel for cold her tender feet,
From the worn top of some old battlement
Hails it with tears, her stout defender sent:
And from her own pure self no joy dissembling,
Wraps round her ample robe with happy trembling.
Sometimes, when the good Knight his rest would take,
It is reflected, clearly, in a lake,
With the young ashen boughs, 'gainst which it rests,
And th' half seen mossiness of linnets' nests.
Ah! shall I ever tell its cruelty,



The tendre c
Bath in the R
And smale fe
That slepen.
So priketh he
Channe long
And palmere
To ferne halv
And speciall
Of Engelone
The hooly bl
That hem ha
seeke.



corage,
At nyght wer
Wel nyne and
Of sondry fo
In felawship
That toward

THAT Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth

considerable sympathy with his typographic exploit. Passionately desirous that his poems should be fitly set forth, he was repeatedly chagrined by the total incapacity, as regards art, of ordinary commercial printers, with the result that he began to devote enthusiastic labor to designing types, and in 1891 he inaugurated the Kelmscott Press with his own *Story of the Glittering Plain*, the volumes he subsequently printed being upwards of fifty in number. The most famous of them to-day is the folio *Chaucer*, which, like almost everything else from Kelmscott, embodies a galaxy of initial letters and kindred ornaments by Morris himself: things of great intrinsic beauty, as witness the specimen shown here. All reflect their creator's tense fondness for the old Illuminators of missals, it being withal regrettable that, in making his actual founts, he took as model the "black-letter" tomes of the middle-ages, for this inevitably resulted in pages inclining to the cryptic. But, if the Kelmscott volumes must therefore be regarded as noble decorative items, rather than as genuine triumphs of typography, plenty of protest against this emulation of mediæval styles has been made by those artists of late years, who, inspired directly or indirectly by Morris, have concerned themselves seriously with book-production.

A gifted painter and sculptor, Charles Ricketts was among the first to show keen interest in Morris's printing, at the same time quickly marking its prime

failing noted above. So he proceeded to fashion some lettering that combined an absolute clearness with beauty, his mode of procedure, however, being simply to entrust his types to a firm of machine-printers, whose doings he supervised with fastidious care. But anon his friend, Lucien Pissarro, who collaborated with him in writing a treatise on typography, commenced using one of Ricketts' founts manually, producing with it artistic renderings of the books of *Job* and *Esther*; while having next designed some finely clear lettering himself, he started the Eragny Press. Thence he has issued what are unquestionably the loveliest achievements in modern hand-printing, each a great work of art, although tiny in size, perhaps the most exquisite of all of them being *Le Livre de Jade*, a collection of verses by Judith Gautier, daughter of Théophile, its pages illustrated by Pissarro's pencil. A daintiness, best described as Japanese, is the main trait of this master's fascinating bibelots.

There are two printers, however, who have resolutely opposed the ornate, these being Cobden-Sanderson at the Doves Press, and Miss Yeats at the Cuala. The former's title-pages show exceptionally fine skill in spacing, and the beauty of his text is of a singularly refined, dignified sort, his almost severe types being just such as a Greek sculptor can

be imagined liking. But on the other hand it is a charming homeliness, as of a picture by an old Dutch painter, which distinguishes the books wrought by Miss Yeats, whose wise taste for the simple is echoed in some degree by Ralph Straus, and by A. K. Sabin.

But another thing which markedly endears the modern hand-printers is the lofty aspiration they all represent. For compared to the expense of most branches of artistic creation, that entailed by typography is formidable; while though those who love volumes of beautiful form love them very much, such people are curiously few. And thus the artist conducting a press must make his art for its own sake, glad if it merely pays its outlay: he must be richly dowered with enthusiasm, possibly the greatest of gifts. Besides, painters and sculptors to-day are sadly inclined to hold aloof from the applied arts, and workers like Miss Yeats and Cobden-Sanderson, Pissarro and Guthrie, have emphasized that it is well for an artist to be an artificer too, beautifying things of use extraneous to ornamentation. Perhaps, then, the renaissance of typography by hand is destined to have momentous results: perhaps it is the herald of another 18th century, that wonderful time, when craftsmanship of all sorts was practised to finer purpose in Britain than ever before.

THE EASTERN RUG-MAKER

By MARGARET WALLACE ATKINS

THE rug maker like the poet is born, not made; but perhaps in a different sense, since all Easterns have been rug makers more or less of necessity, this industry being their sole income and their one method of self expression since back beyond history.

Many of the weavers were unlearned and unlettered in all save this art, which they acquired so early and with such exclusion and concentration that their eyes became trained to its intricacies and they did their color schemes from memory.

Until late years when the West added its demand to the already heavy call in the East, most of the work was done by women and children, while the men folk tended the flocks and tilled the fields; but when the Western method of hurry and exploitation reached them, the men and boys entered the commercial arena. So competition increased until it became a question of quantity not quality, and Eastern rug making had already closed its book of romance, its weaving and dreaming, and weaving in of dreams, before the hungry war god came to swallow the whole race in his ugly maw.

The East has a language the West does not easily understand—our philosophies, our moral codes, our habits, are leagues apart; but happily the sense of beauty transcends all these conventions, and we have met the East over its product of beautiful rugs,—our only real contact in all our efforts at approachment.

In his special industry, that is in the East, he commands our wonder, our admiration: nor is he of yesterday. Homer, Pliny, Horace, Scipio all knew him, and pictures of weavers at work are found in the earliest Egyptian tombs.

It was, and is yet in the East, the custom to hang priceless rugs on the graves of notables, and even to this day the tombs of Israel, Isaac and Jacob are not forgotten. This memory, this fidelity, would be impossible anywhere other than in the brooding East, where a thousand years count nothing; where time is verily a fiction, since they brood ever on the Eternal and the Imminence of God.

In the Western world where we are compact of materialism, this holds our imagination; we look wonderingly at him across the chasm that divides us and we buy his rugs. Dimly we know, for dimly only can we perceive him, that he lived close to the symbols of his religion, and that he worked with the true artistry of putting himself into what he created; in his colors and designs are woven his faiths, his hopes, his fears, and his sorrows.

From time immemorial rugs have represented riches and dowries in the East, and their value has been steadily growing: so it required no prophetic vision when some one, writing in 1903, warned the public to treasure their genuine specimens, as the end of the Eastern rug making as we had known it was well in sight. He meant only the menace of machinery and the destroying influence of competition and exploitation in an industry where leisure, beauty and romance were of its essentials.

At the beginning of the war, the trade journals made an outcry and some move was started to corner all the known genuine pieces, but things were again left to their own adjustment, and we can still with industry and a fortunate purse become collectors. Always valued for their beauty of coloring, now that the race of rug makers is